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Members Who Inspire

Seattle attorney Mason Ji supports immigrants and cultural awareness

By [Anna Stolley Persky](#)

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Seattle attorney Mason Ji. Photo courtesy of Mason Ji.

At 30, Mason Ji, an associate in the Seattle office of Perkins Coie, is keenly focused on community. While his legal practice involves complex litigation, international sanctions and international trade, Ji's spare time is spent helping Asian immigrants struggling to succeed in the greater Seattle area.

“I had a difficult childhood, and I have seen the problems that immigrant families face,” Ji says. “There are so many ways to try to make an impact, and so that’s what I’m trying to do.”

Since 2020, Ji has hosted a monthly show in Mandarin on the radio station KKNW. During the 40-minute time slot, Ji helps explain aspects of the legal system such as landlord-tenant law, voting rights and how the court process works.

“The show is aimed at giving Chinese American immigrants—especially those who don’t speak a lot of English—more confidence in their understanding of the law,” Ji says.

Ji’s show, *Decoding America*, airs on the second Saturday of the month as part of Chinese Radio Seattle’s civic programming.

Ji also serves on the board of the Friends of Bellevue Cross-Cultural Center, a nonprofit working to build a facility to help with cross-cultural dialogue in Bellevue, a Seattle suburb.

The Friends of Bellevue Cross-Cultural Center “is a community-based nonprofit I founded to bring people of all cultures and backgrounds together to learn about one another, to find common ground and work together in unity,” says Conrad Lee, the longest-serving member of the Bellevue City Council. “Mason is an integral member of the board.”

Lee, who was born in China and became the first Asian mayor of Bellevue, has been a mentor to Ji.

“Mason was my first intern in high school. We stayed close when he went on to college. He was a top scholar and multitalented,” Lee says.

‘I know what it’s like’

Ji’s mother and father emigrated from China in the early 1990s. Ji and his younger sister were born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, but his father returned to China for work, and Ji’s mother took them to the Seattle area, where she worked as a research technician. But that job didn’t pay enough to keep the family afloat, so his mother often juggled additional part-time jobs. Ji says there were times his family didn’t have enough money for food.

Ji now sits on the associate board of Hunger Free America, a nonprofit based in New York City that works with food pantries throughout the United States. “I feel like being part of Hunger Free America is particularly meaningful for me because I went through hunger, and I know what it’s like,” he says.

“It was really hard growing up in a single-family immigrant household, especially in the Seattle area at that time,” he says. “I was often the only Asian American in my classes in elementary and middle school, and that was a hard experience. I heard the gamut of racial slurs, and there was a lot of bullying.”

Even when he went to a magnet high school where there were more Asian Americans, Ji felt isolated from the other students, who seemed to have more money than he did. Ji often took refuge in the library, where he found mentoring programs.

“There were people who made themselves available to help with homework,” Ji says. “And the public libraries had heating, which we couldn’t always afford.”

Despite the challenges he faced, Ji did well throughout high school. “He performed solo oboe at his high school commencement,” Lee recalls. “His oboe is amazing. Mason excels in almost everything he does.”

Global focus

Ji says he had a “vague idea” that he might want to become a lawyer, but he also was interested in international diplomacy. He could speak fluent Mandarin, thanks to his mother, and had earned his certification to be a translator. Ji also speaks a little French but says he’s “pretty rusty at it.”

He attended Yale University with significant financial aid. Before going to college, however, he attended a reception at Perkins Coie for students headed to Yale.

“I thought, ‘Man, if I ever become a lawyer, I want to work here,’” Ji says.

During his freshman year, Ji got a gig as a translator helping the ambassador for Seychelles. That job turned into an opportunity for the 18-year-old to serve as a delegate representing Seychelles at the United Nations. Ji arranged his Yale class schedule so he could travel to New York City on Fridays to attend United Nations meetings on behalf of the country and participate in negotiations on topics like disarmament and climate change.

“It was just a fascinating front row seat in how international law works,” Ji says.

During his junior year of college, Ji interned with the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. While still juggling his classes, he traveled all over the country to assist the White House in hosting campus engagement events and roundtable discussions. He had the opportunity to present to then-President Barack Obama.

“It was supercool and super nerve-racking,” Ji says.

Ji graduated from Yale in 2016 with a double major in global affairs and political science. He then attended the University of Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, obtaining a master’s degree in global governance and diplomacy, and then a second master’s in public policy. After that, Ji headed to Harvard Law School. Ji graduated in 2021, spending his third year working as a law clerk in Perkins Coie’s commercial litigation group. He also served as an executive editor for the *Harvard International Law Journal*.

When he was hired as a first-year associate at Perkins Coie, Ji continued working on complex litigation cases, but he wanted to add another dimension to his practice.

“I wanted to go into litigation because I wanted to advocate,” Ji says. “But it didn’t take long before I started craving the international flavor to the law, so I added practicing international sanctions law. Now my practice is a combination of litigation and international trade work, bringing together both of my passions.”

Ji's activities outside of his law practice keep him busy. In addition to dedicating his time to fighting hunger and supporting the local Asian American community, he lectures on international law at the University of Washington School of Law.

"It's an awesome opportunity to engage with students and give back by teaching to the next generation of lawyers," Ji says.

He joined the American Bar Association after he started practicing law. He is the district representative for Washington and Oregon for the [ABA Young Lawyers Division](#). Ji also serves as the ABA's alternate observer to the [U.S. Mission to the United Nations](#).

"I joined the ABA immediately because for me, there is a lot of value in engaging with the larger issues in our profession," Ji says. "And it's another chance to make an impact and give back."

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